

# VERMONT AGRICULTURAL PROCEDURE FOR BMP PROGRAM

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## **Program Overview**

The Best Management Practice Cost Share Program enables farmers to cost effectively construct best management practice systems (BMPs). For many of the participants in the program, BMP construction would not be affordable without the State's grant. By constructing BMPs, farmers are able to more cost effectively use nutrients and handle agricultural wastes. BMP construction also enables farmers to comply with State and federal water quality regulations. Additionally, implementation of BMPs assures the significant public benefit of reducing phosphorus loading to waters of the State. The Agency's BMP Cost Share Program enjoys widespread support from the agricultural and environmental communities, as well as the general public.

The Agency's authority to cost share BMPs is governed by 6 V.S.A. Chapter 215 and the BMP Rules. The Agency's grants are limited to a cap of 35 percent of the total actual costs of the system in cases where either the federal government or other entities cost share the system, or 50 to 80 percent on projects with no other source of cost share assistance. Combined federal, State and other cost share participation may not exceed 85 percent of the eligible costs, ensuring grant recipients pay at least 15 percent of the total cost of each BMP. For State-only cost-shared BMP projects, the State's contribution cap is \$50,000 for a single farm practice and \$75,000 for multiple farm practices.

BMP systems eligible for State cost share dollars must meet design standards and specifications established by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or be designed and certified by a professional engineer licensed in the State of Vermont to be equivalent to the federal performance standards and specifications. The system must be operated and maintained for the design life of the system (typically ten years) according to a plan that includes strict provisions for nutrient management and system upkeep. Failure to follow the operation and maintenance plan exposes the grant recipients to liability to repay the State's investment, either totally or in part.

## **Application Process**

Applications are accepted throughout the year with preference given to applicants who submit requests fulfilling four conditions: Type of Practice, Environmental Impact, Regulatory Responsibility and Monetary Commitment. Applications are evaluated on a competitive basis before funds are obligated, pending funding availability.

All applications are evaluated by the Department's BMP Cost Share Program according to the funding priorities established in the statute and the BMP Rules. The information below summarizes the application process for acceptance or denial into the Program. The application process may be halted at any of these four steps pending the project evaluation criteria stated herein.

1. Initial discussion between farmer and State regarding proposed project. Project summary is documented by the State (typically via telephone).
2. Initial site visit and detailed project evaluation criteria are assessed.
3. BMP Application submitted from applicant and approximate project cost determined.
4. Inform the applicant of the contract approval or denial.

## **Project Evaluation Criteria**

There are four project evaluation criteria to define a BMP project, which are outlined below.

### **1. Type of Practice**

- a. Production Area Practices and Livestock Exclusion (50 to 80% cost-shared)  
Examples: Silage leachate collection and treatment systems, livestock exclusion from streams, heavy use areas or barnyards and waste storage facilities.
- b. Non-Production Areas or Field Practices (50% cost-shared)  
Examples: Field waste stacking areas, channel stabilization/ protection, composting facility, water diversion, access roads and stream crossings.

### **2. Environmental Impact**

- a. Potential for surface water and groundwater water impacts with high nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and pathogen levels; priority is given to those farms based on their proximity to a body of surface water.
- b. Soil Type and Permeability (for structures only); priority is given to those farms with soils that are more permeable and thus potentially causing more disturbances to groundwater.

### **3. Regulatory Responsibility**

- a. Priority shall be given to proposed improvements on farms that currently do not meet the AAPs and those farms regulated by the State.

### **4. Commitment**

- a. Greatest improvement for the State's monetary investment; priority is given to projects that have lower costs or with the greatest mitigation per dollar spent.
- b. Existing infrastructure improvement vs. new system needed; priority is given to those who have not yet received BMP money.
- c. Ability to carry through on project(s) requesting State assistance; priority is given to those who have demonstrated commitment during the project development.

## **Project Implementation Steps**

Below is the process to implement a BMP project, taking a minimum of 30-45 days from the signed BMP Application until the first day of construction. These steps are as follows:

1. Signed BMP application submitted from farmer to State (confirm application submission).
2. Subsequent visits between engineer and farmer.
3. Detailed design by engineer in direct collaboration with farmer.
4. Meeting between engineer, contractor and farmer to establish construction of design.
5. Prepare and sign cost-share contract between farmer and the State.
6. Inspection during actual construction process documented by State engineer.
7. Post-construction inspection documented by State engineer.
8. Farmer submits contractor statements and documented farm labor/equipment hours to State.
9. State tabulates cost-shared amount based on actual project cost and allocates corresponding BMP money to farmer.